

July 31, 2008

Dear Friends:

Recently, many questions have arisen about our new testing program for students in grades three through eight. One question is what will be the name of the new test, but I'll get to that in a minute. The program replaces the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests and represents the first significant changes to the Education Accountability Act in ten years. So, I wanted to give you an update on how that's progressing.

Let me re-emphasize that although PACT is gone, end-of-the-year accountability testing is not going away. Such tests are mandated by both EAA and No Child Left Behind. This new test will help us to maintain our state's national reputation for setting high academic expectations and will strike a better balance between end-of-the-year accountability testing and that which occurs during the school year.

All students in grades 3–8 will take the writing test. It will most likely be administered in March. This test will consist of editing passages with multiple-choice questions and a writing prompt with space for students to write an extended response.

English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies will be administered during one week in May. These tests will contain multiple-choice items only. All students in grades 3–8 must take the ELA and mathematics tests. All students in grades 4 and 7 will take both the science and the social studies tests. Students in grades 3, 5, 6, and 8 will take either the science or the social studies test.

The new overall test performance levels are:

- Exemplary – The student demonstrated exemplary performance in meeting the grade level standard.
- Met – The student met the grade level standard.
- Not Met – The student did not meet the grade level standard.

We crossed a major hurdle with the establishment of this new test, but we still have a lot of work to do. Testing dates are currently being determined. In addition, hundreds of teachers will be serving on various committees to review test questions; a sensitivity bias committee will work to ensure that the language and concepts for each question are fair to all students; and administrators and technical advisers will focus on the logistics of test administration.

Finally, we need your help to give the new test a name. Please send suggestions to **Judy Hair** (jhair@ed.sc.gov) by August 8.

I am excited about what this new assessment will mean for the students that we serve. Working together, we can build a stronger foundation for success.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education